

REMENDER • CRAIG • LOUGHRIDGE

DEADLY CLASS™



1988

#12

The Story So Far...

When Marcus Lopez, a homeless San Franciscan orphan, was asked to join Kings Dominion Atelier of the Deadly Arts, a shadowy school specializing in training the next generation of the world's deadliest assassins, he expected trouble wouldn't be far behind. But he had no idea.

Naturally distrusting, Marcus had trouble fitting into his new surroundings. But with time he made a small circle of friends: Saya, the raven-haired Yakuza's daughter. Willie, a young gangbanger from LA. Billy, a quick-witted punk. And Maria, beautiful and sorrowful Maria, girlfriend of Chico, son of the most violent Cartel boss in Mexico.

Maria saw a kindred spirit in Marcus and the two became close, sending Chico into a murderous jealous frenzy. During a drug-fueled night in Las Vegas, Chico came for Marcus' life but was himself killed by Maria.

Chico's decapitated head was later stolen by a burgeoning serial killer called "Fuckface," who turned out to be Marcus's roommate from the sadistic orphanage that he escaped from as a child when he burned it to the ground.

For years, Fuckface had harbored a grudge against Marcus for "stealing his rep": the deaths of dozens of orphans, which Fuckface had killed during the fire, but the cops had pinned on Marcus instead.

While searching for way to stop news of Chico's death from getting out, Marcus grew closer to Saya, the girl who indoctrinated him into the school, and whose dark charms he could no longer resist. Though Maria had killed to save his life, Marcus cheated on her with Saya.

During a nightly raid on Fuckface's stronghold, Marcus, Willie, Saya, Billy, Maria and Lex succeeded in killing the bloodthirsty psychopath and his gang and recover Chico's severed head.

But Maria discovered Marcus and Saya's betrayal of her love and friendship and it seemed like Marcus would lose what few friends he'd managed to make for himself.

Enter *El Alma del Diablo*, the man who murdered Maria's family, arriving at the scene, seeing Marcus hold the head of his beloved son Chico...

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"WHERE THE *FUCK*
ARE THEY, SAYA?!"

"THEY'RE SUPPOSED
TO BE HERE--*NOW!*"

"THEY MUST'VE TAKEN
ANOTHER ROUTE IS ALL."

THIS IS THE
GODDAMNED
CHECKPOINT
AND THEY'RE
NOT AT IT!

FIREFIGHTERS
SCREWED UP
THE GETAWAY
PLOT.

THEY
JUST WENT
ANOTHER
WAY.

NO.

TOK

WHAT DO
YOU MEAN,
"*NO*"?

SKREE

WE *HAVE*
TO GO
BACK.

MAKE
SURE THEY
GOT OUT.

THE REDNECKS
ARE *DEAD*. NO
COP CAN CATCH
ANY OF US.

THEY'RE
FINE--BUT IF
WE STAY HERE
WE *WON'T*
BE.

GET
YOUR SHIT
TOGETHER
AND *COME*
ON!

YEAH?

OKAY...

YOU'RE
PROBABLY
RIGHT...



"...THEY'RE PROBABLY FINE."

A *TRULY* REMARKABLE BOUT OF *HEROISM* YOU LADS HAVE SHOWN!

COLOR THIS MAIL TOTTER *IMPRESSED!*



CHEERIO AND TOODLE PIP!

"WHEN I RECEIVED WORD, I DIDN'T BELIEVE IT."



SO I BROUGHT THE FAMILY TRINITY.

FATHER, HOLY GHOST, AND PALE RIDER, ALL COME TO KILL THE REFUSE WHO *DARED* SULLY MY BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER'S NAME.

YOU'RE *NOT* MY FATHER.

NO. UNLIKE YOUR FATHER...



"...I WAS GOING TO *FIGHT* TO PROTECT YOU."

ENJOY VICIOUSLY ARSE-FUCKING ONE ANOTHER AT THE BARRACKS, YOU FASCIST CUNTS!

CHEERS!



YOU DIDN'T COME HERE TO SAVE ME!

EL ALMA DEL DIABLO CARES ONLY FOR ITSELF!

BETTER CHILL THE OL' LADY OUT, BUDDY.

MY OLD MAN IS THE REAL *HARDCORE*...



"...YOU DON'T WANT HIM ANGRY."

SORRY I STOLE YOUR BADGE.

TOSSER.



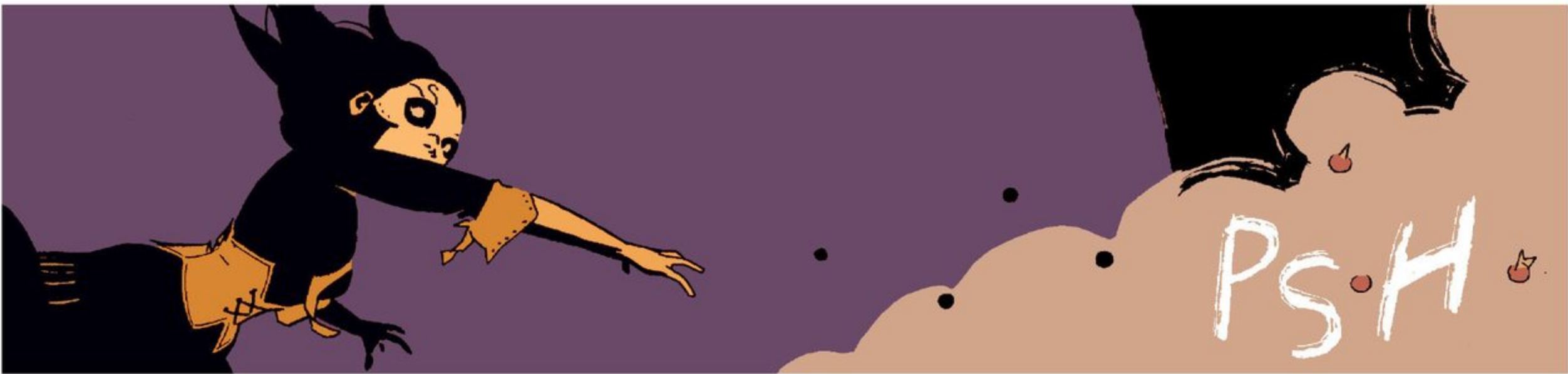
YOU SHOULD BE SILENT, GIRL.

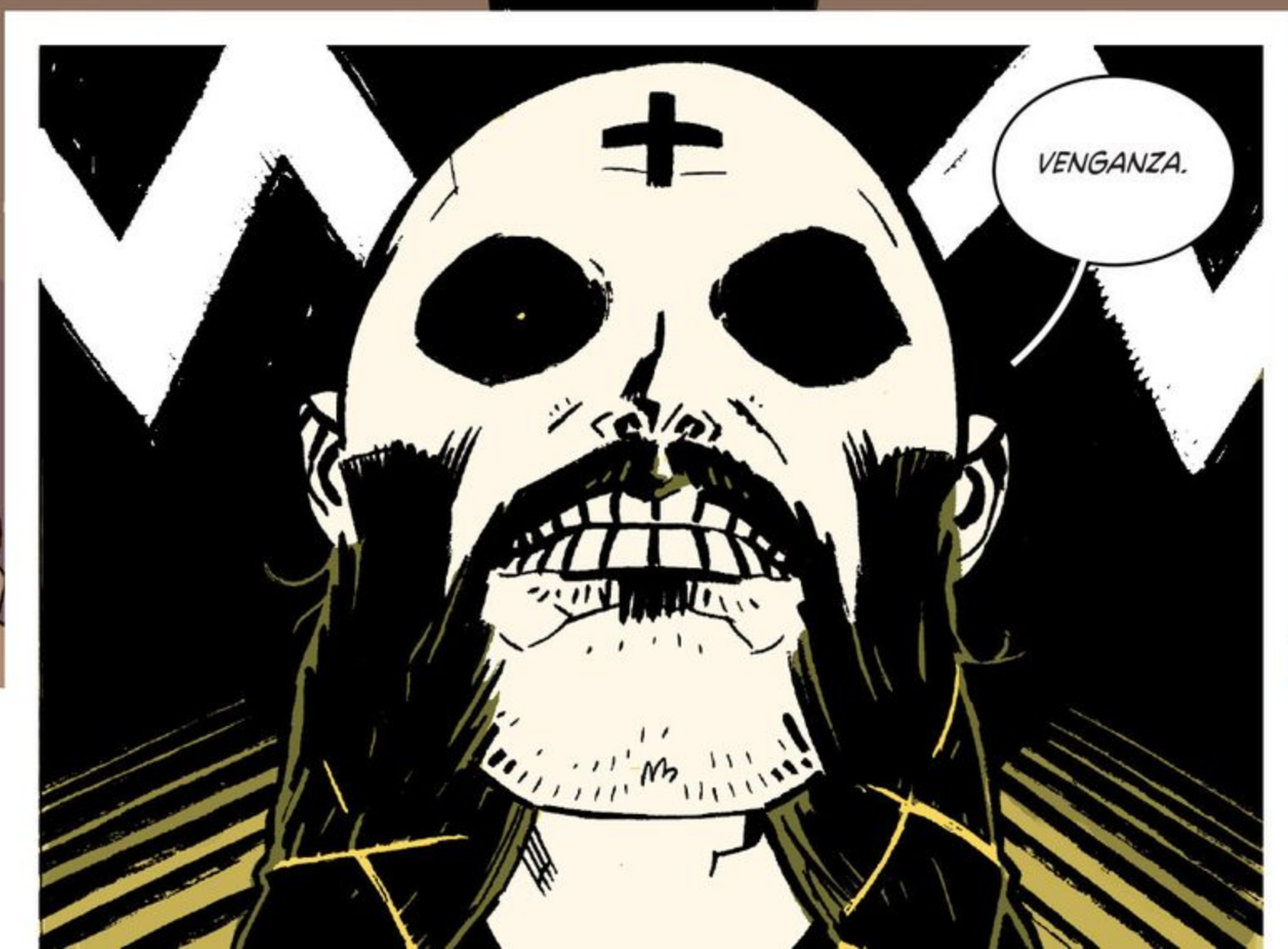
I WILL NOT ENGAGE IN NAME CALLING WITH A CHILD WHOSE COMPANION HOLDS THE SEVERED HEAD OF MY SON.

NO...













DEADLY CLASSES

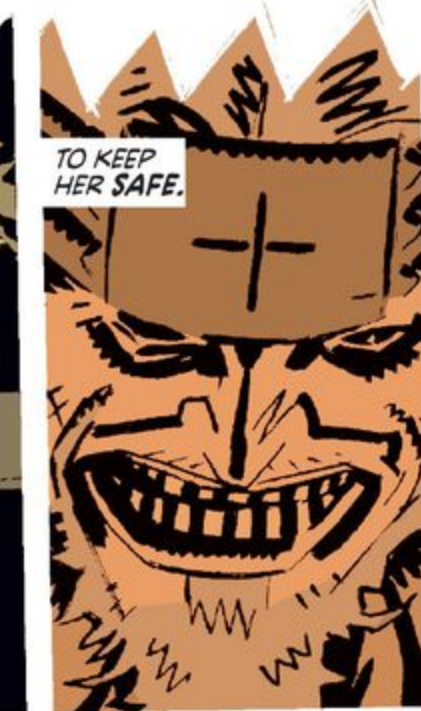
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GUILT FOR SAYA.

GUILT FOR WHAT YOU KNEW YOU'D DO.



BECAUSE ALL LIFE EVER TAUGHT YOU IS THAT YOU'RE UNLIKEABLE, AND NOTHING WOULD WORK OUT.



SO YOU ALWAYS BEAT IT TO THE PUNCH.



QUICK-- THIS WAY!



YHAERGH--!

METAL ON BONE IN THE BACKGROUND--

--SOMEONE IN THE WRONG PLACE AND THE WRONG TIME.

NOTHING TO BE DONE--



JUST GET THEM AWAY FROM HERE--

GET MARIA AWAY FROM THEM.

FASTER!

I'M TRYING!

MARIA.

DUMB ENOUGH TO TRUST ME.



ANOTHER DYSFUNCTIONAL, WAR-DAMAGED ORPHAN LOOKING FOR SOMETHING GOOD--AND FINDING ONLY THE SAME OLD SHIT.

MY BACKPACK-- THERE'S A GRENADE IN IT!

SHE WASN'T LOOKING FOR A BOYFRIEND--



A FAMILY I DESTROYED.

DO IT!



ON MY OWN TERMS.



SWAT!

SOMEONE TO HURT--





--SHE CAME BACK FOR YOU.

HURRY!
I'VE GOT
AN IDEA.

PULLS YOU THROUGH A
SOUP OF BRAIN DAMAGE
AND BROKEN BONES.

AS THE ASPHALT
QUAKES.



A DRAGON
GROWLS
AWAKE.

THAT ENGINE---

THE MOST TERRIFYING
SOUND I'VE EVER
HEARD.



PRAY TO THIN
AIR HER PLAN
WORKS.



VENGANZA.





IT'S NOT SO EASY.

I NEVER TOLD YOU...I SAW MY PARENTS DIE AS WELL.

A JUMPER LANDED ON THEM IN FRONT OF ME.

I REMEMBER THINKING IF I DIDN'T LOOK IT WASN'T REAL.



SO I STOOD WATCHING A BALLOON MY FATHER HAD BOUGHT ME DRIFT AWAY.

WATCHED IT UNTIL SOMEONE HAD THROWN A BLANKET OVER THEM.

AND I NEVER SAW THEM AGAIN.



YOUR PAIN, MARIA... EVERYTHING YOU WERE GOING THROUGH...

IT WAS TOO CLOSE TO HOME.

I HAD TO GET AWAY FROM IT.



I GO THE OTHER WAY.

THE ONLY WAY I CAN IDENTIFY WITH ANYONE IS THROUGH A SIMILAR PAINFUL EXPERIENCE.



MY PAIN IS THE ONLY THING THAT DEFINES ME.

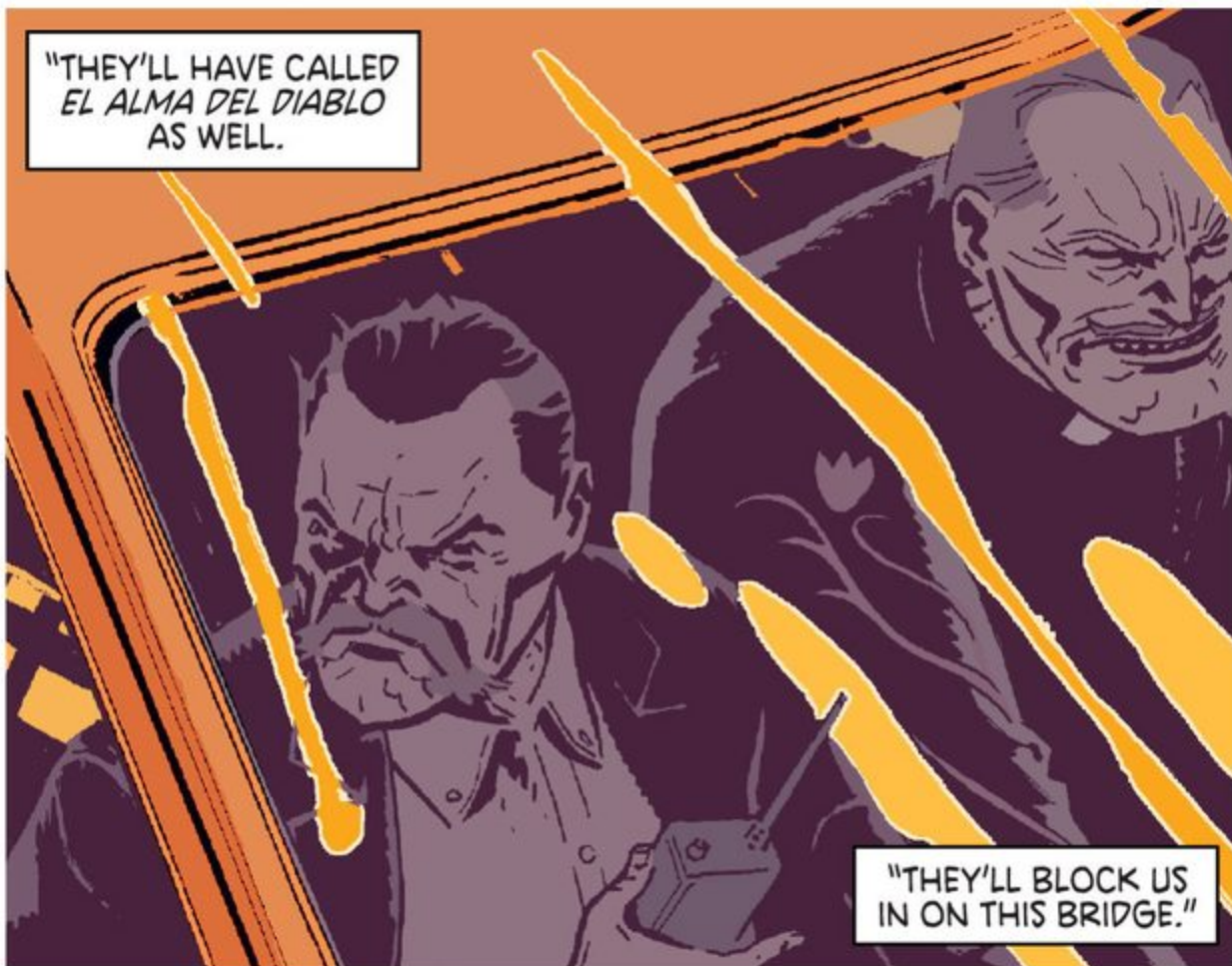
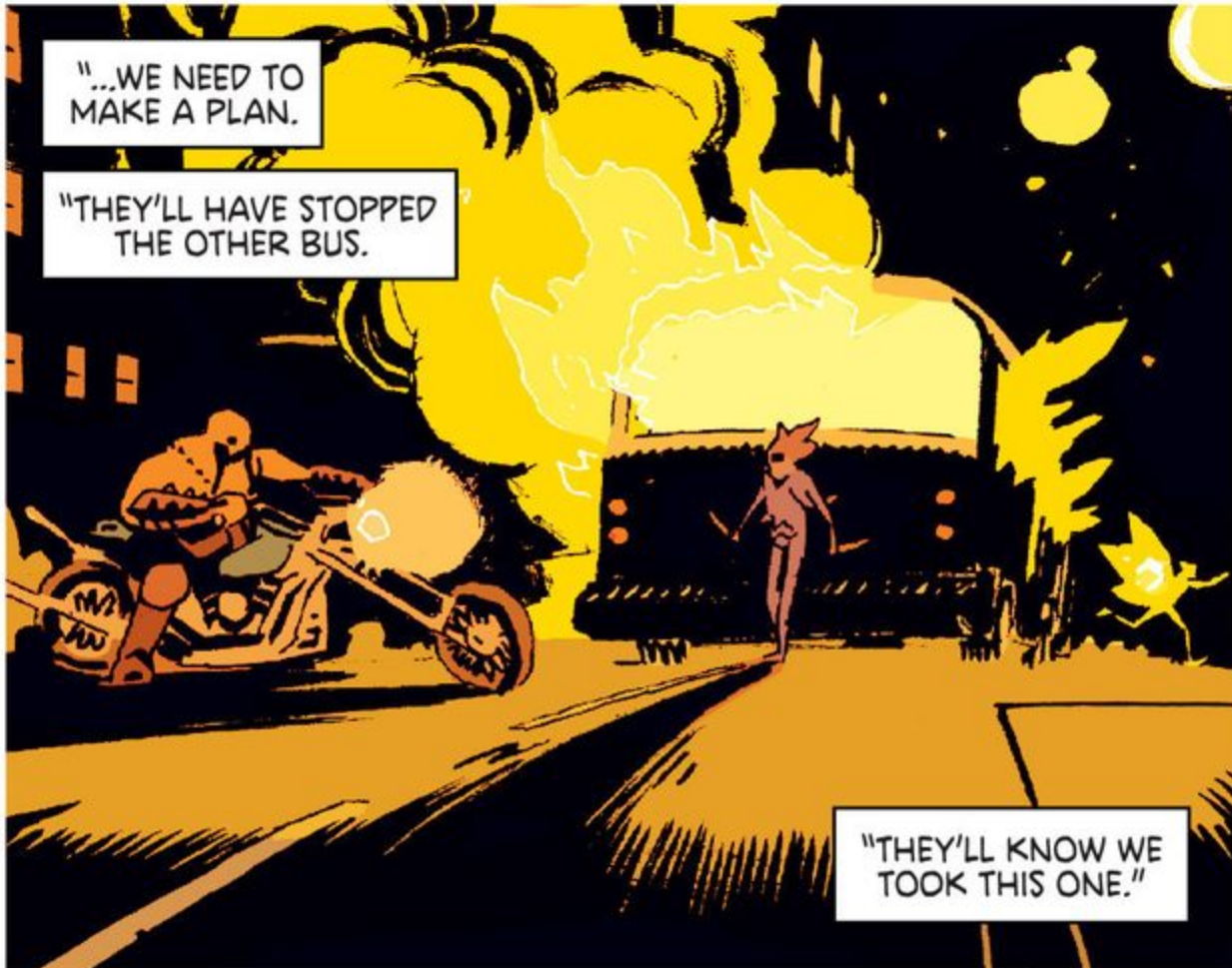


LIFE DRAINED ME SO EMPTY AND ALL I WANTED WAS SOMEONE WHO UNDERSTOOD THAT PAIN.



SOMEONE WHO COULD LOVE ME.

I...



FIRE.

IT ALWAYS BRINGS
BACK THE OLD HORROR.

MAMA **SCREAMING**
AS SHE BURNED.

PAPA NAILED TO THE
WELL POST, **WEeping**
AS THEY TOOK ME AWAY.

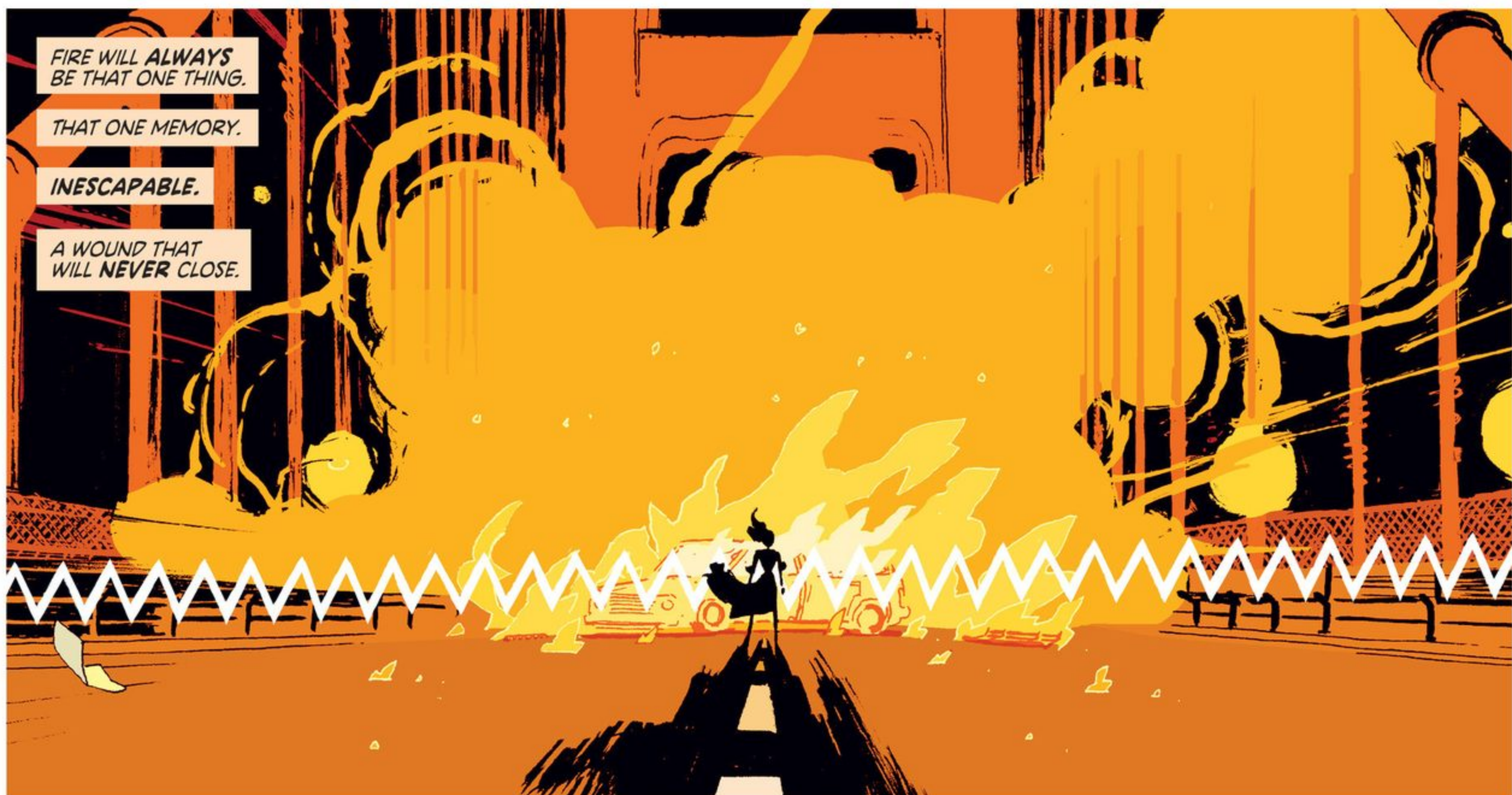


FIRE WILL **ALWAYS**
BE THAT ONE THING.

THAT ONE MEMORY.

INESCAPABLE.

A WOUND THAT
WILL **NEVER** CLOSE.



THE WOUND
GIVES ME
POWER.

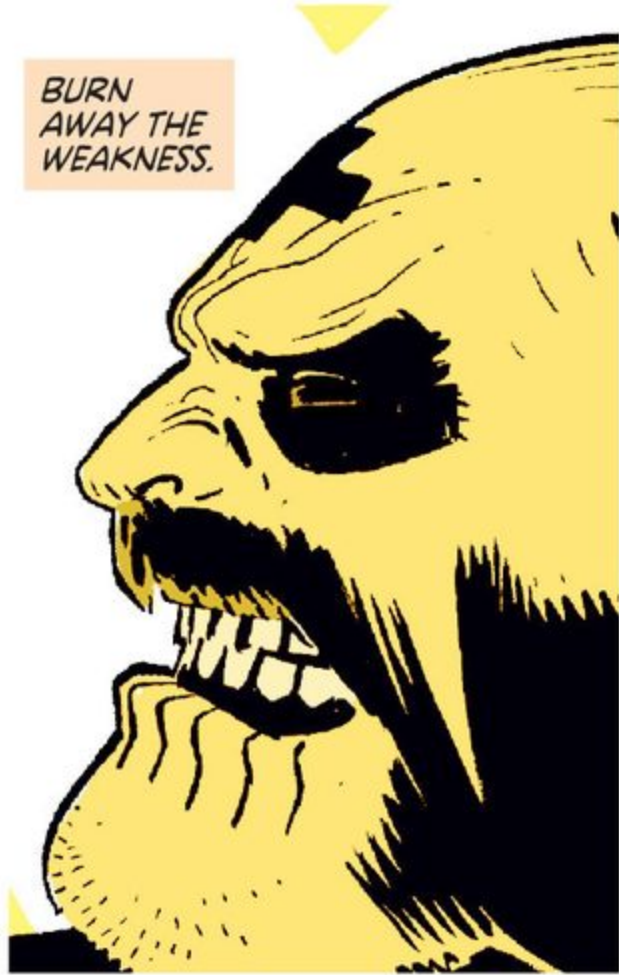
IT'S NOT THE **WOUND**
THAT BROUGHT THIS ON--

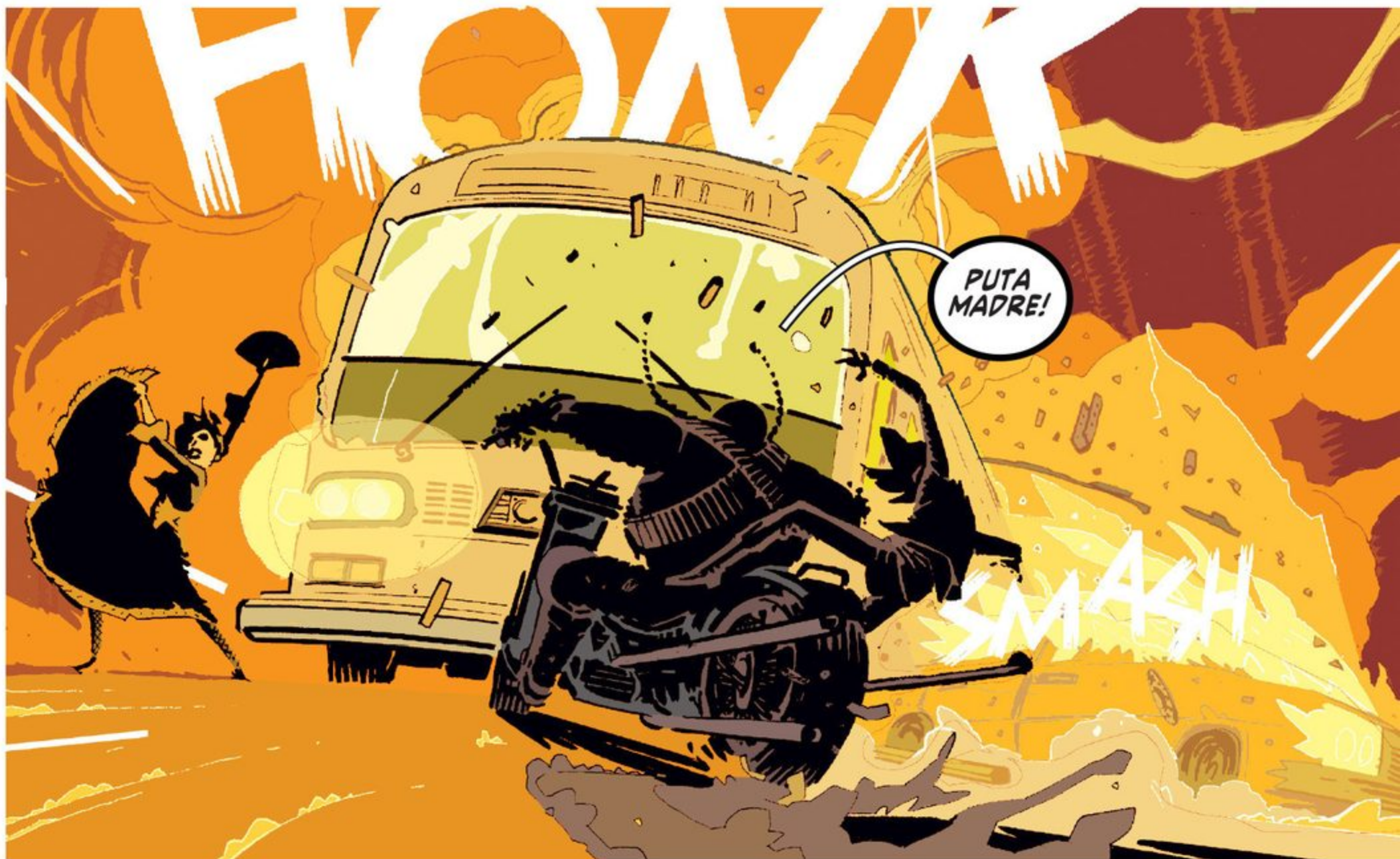


--IT WAS MY NEED
TO **SATE** THE PAIN.

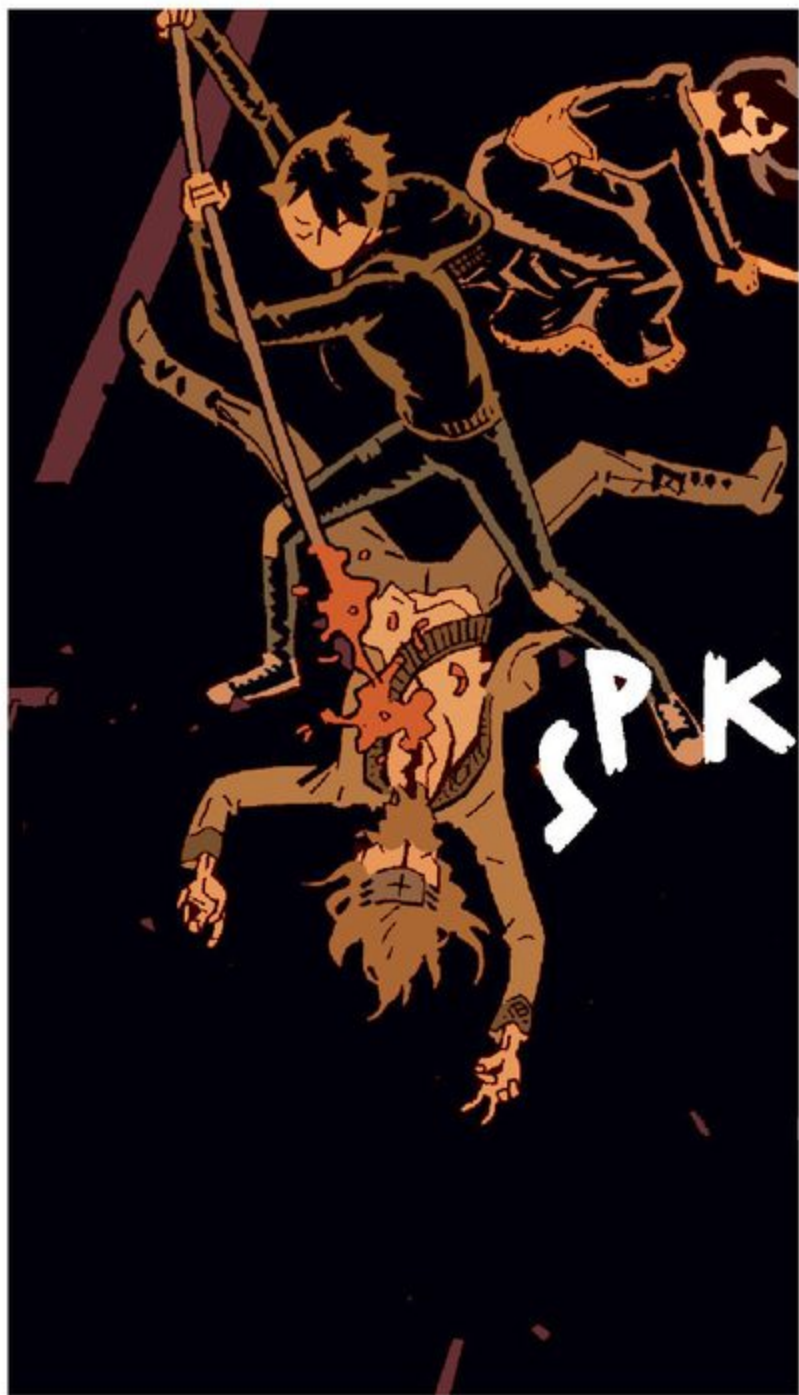
TO TAKE ITS
POWER AWAY.

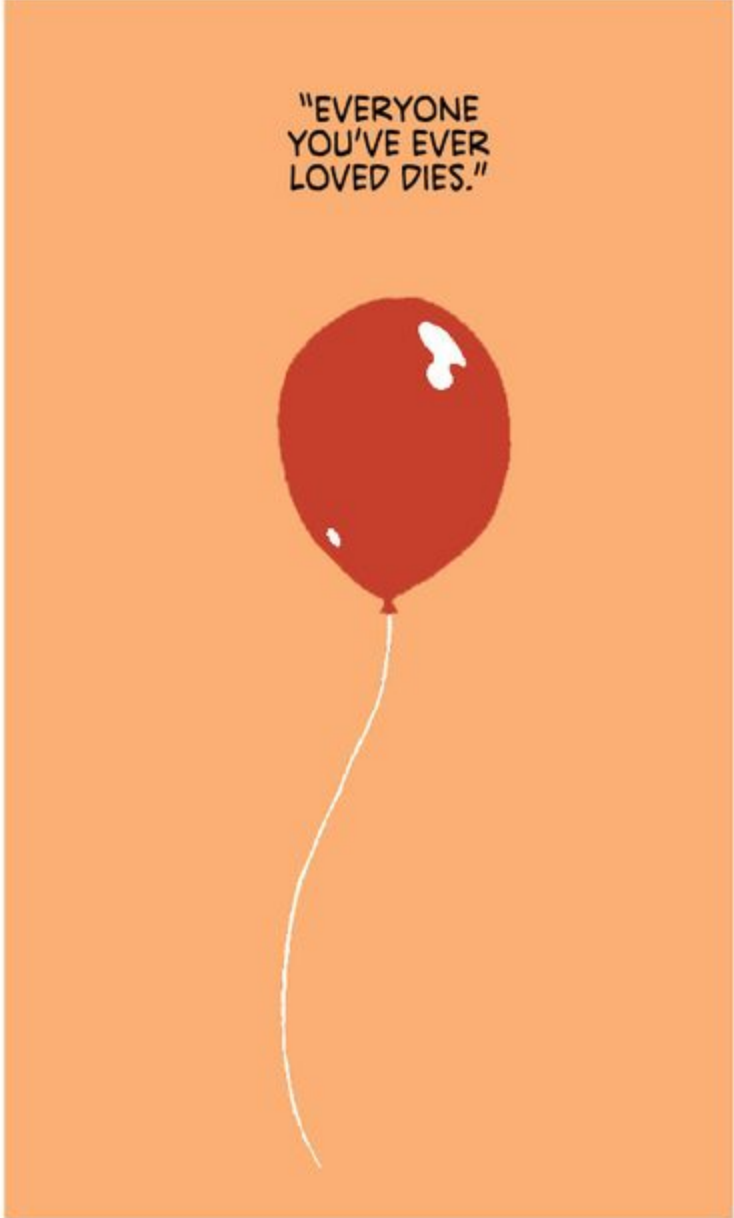












"WHY SHOULD HE BE
ANY DIFFERENT?"



DEAD LETTER OFFICE

RR - Welcome back! Big things are happening to our twisted teen terrors. That felt a bit “Stan Lee” so I went with it. Sue me.

Letters time!

Wow, what you guys are doing with this comic is absolutely incredible.

When I first saw the comic on the shelf of my LCS, I was intrigued by its cover’s minimalist palette, and needed to thumb through a few pages to see what was up. After quickly scanning the pages, I immediately gravitated towards the art and layout; the colors seemed carefully chosen and muted to set a mood, the figures stylized but real, the lines gritty yet clear.

RR - Wes, Lee, and Rus are one of the very best teams in comics. You're right to give them your money. Your money is their money. Your money nourishes their talent and buys them drugs and pornography. You do God's work and you live the life of a champion.

I got the impression the story would be something like a mature version of the X-Men with some high school drama mixed in, and that didn't seem bad to me. But man, when I got home and finally indulged in the book (and it may have taken me almost an hour to fully read and appreciate) I was stunned. I felt as I did when I first read *The Outsiders* in middle school, or *Catcher in the Rye* a few years later, or when I first watched *The Matrix* or *Donnie Darko*. Basically, I felt young again, and I'm not even that old, but the notes you guys hit, the strings you pluck, they evoke that angst, that longing to be part of something else, they take you back. Every character felt more real or believable to me than most of the characters I had come across in any other comic on the shelves. I fell in love with the books setting and aesthetic, and I really dug the extra bit of info on each character in the letters section, as well as the set lists.



RR - Many of the characters are amalgamations of people that I've known. Taking various traits, slapping them together to create something new and interesting.

Anyways, Rick, Wes, Rus, and Lee, you guys just keep getting tighter. You’re like a band, and you’re killing it right now. Please don't stop,

Made a little fan art for you guys in the form of a fake cover design. Really wanted to represent some of my favorite culture from the '80s, as well as one of my favorite characters from the book. Hope you guys think it's alright.

P.S. If this book were set in the present, Saya would have to listen to Lodro, The Soft Moon, Women, Viet Cong, Sunflower Beam, and Diiv.

RR - Really great to hear from somebody who gets the book. It's a specific flavor and it seems that we've found an audience who really love it. Seeing fan art like this is incredibly inspirational for us. Thanks for taking the time to draw it and write in. Wes and I are both going to try out some of the bands you listed.

Hey Rick,

This email has been a long time coming.

Sometimes, you get the feeling you have a lot in common before you even meet the person. Of course, it helps that you're not shy about spilling your guts in your editorials/letter columns/forewords and so on. It certainly helps that DEADLY CLASS has been so autobiographical.

But my admiration for you and your work started much earlier than DEADLY CLASS. Before I was aware of the names behind comic creation, I was actually a fan of the work you did with *TMNT* back in the day.

It wouldn't be until years later, when you were writing *Venom* and *Uncanny X-Force*, that I'd be fully aware of you, your writing and your crazy ass backstory.

Normally, I hate over-sharing. I hate it, it makes me feel weird, and a lot of people tend to do it to me. Maybe I seem like someone who can deal with it, maybe I seem trustworthy, like I won't just go around telling everyone (I never do, for what that's worth), I don't know. But it always throws me off every time, because it usually starts as a normal conversation about growing up in some boring town, and suddenly you hear about this person you barely know finding their uncle naked and dead in the living room from auto-erotic asphyxiation and why would you ever tell anyone that?

I guess this is to prepare you for a weird emotional unloading. This one that's about to happen in the next paragraph and beyond.

I am the gay son of a murderer. The story technically starts well before my birth; it starts with a family of Mexicans immigrating to Chicago in the '50s. One of the many kids in that family, specifically the one who would grow up to be my father, had a rough go of things. It was Chicago,

and it was not the greatest time to be in Chicago, let alone poor, and brown, and not wonderful with English quite yet. He'd eventually grow up to being a teen, and it became painfully evident that to survive in that city, at that particular time, with those particular circumstances, you'd have to join a gang. And what better gang to join, than the Latin Kings, a hot new start-up at the time (the '60s)?

This gives birth to a host of stories of growing up in a gang, and I have no idea how many are actually true, since people like my dad are given to exaggeration and truth-stretching. You know, sociopaths. I do know that he was actually a Latin King, and that he's now considered a "Grandfather" of the Kings in those circles. And I do know that I have his copy of the Latin King manifesto or, more accurately, the "Chapter Constitution of the Almighty Latin King Nation."

There are plenty of stories of kidnappings, running drugs, gang warfare in the streets, his best friend and mentor dying in his arms. It all made for a rich tapestry of stories we were told growing up.

As you can probably imagine, he wasn't the easiest person to grow up with. He's a tyrant. A monster. An abusive thug who gets off on beating defenseless kids, using terror and a whole mess of creative punishments to keep us in line. Holding his 5-year-old son's hand over an open flame because the son smacked his sister on the butt will always stand out. And, of course, given his predilection for criminal activity, we never stayed in one place for too long. Meeting new people, I often get asked where I'm from. It usually leads to me saying, "Well, I was born in Miami, but I grew up in Chicago, Indianapolis, Cancun, and finally Maine." This 100% of the time leads to them saying, "Oh, military family, huh?"

NOPE. Just a band of fucking gypsies lead by our criminal patriarch.

Honestly, the constant change of scenery is probably why I'm so good with people, why I adapt well to new environments and circumstances. So at least something good came of it. I blend well with new people. It doesn't matter who it is. In high school, I had friends in every social clique you could think of. It was a survival tool. In adulthood, it means I keep most people at a distance until I know I can trust them, but am otherwise friendly and warm. Which seems weird saying, as I'm saying all of this personal stuff to, essentially, a complete stranger. I'd say maybe ten people know the things I'm saying to you right now. I guess I just think you get it.

My dad spent most of my childhood in jail. At the time, when I still had unconditional love for both of my parents, it all seemed very unfair. He was my dad: my loving caring, sometimes scary, but still my dad, dad. When you're not exposed to what "normal" dads are like, you just assume that yours IS normal and you probably wouldn't get hit so much if you'd just behave, except you don't know what that means because sometimes you'd get a beating for doing something pretty bad like lighting firecrackers in the house, or for something completely unacceptable like quietly watching Sesame Street.

In retrospect, it was better that he wasn't around. I don't carry as much damage as my siblings, all of whom are much older than I am. I certainly carry some, but they took the brunt of his crazy, often when trying to protect me, so you could say I'm lucky, considering how much worse it could have been. I was spared years of abuse because his criminal history caught up to him. More accurately, my older sister called the police on him years after he killed someone during a drug investigation he was an informant for. (Things technically caught up to him earlier, but he turned informant because it was convenient, then fucked that up, too, by killing someone. He just can't help himself.) My sister moved out shortly after my dad was arrested. She was 16, I was 9 or 10, and I remember her coming into my room at night to give me a kiss goodbye while I pretended to be asleep. I didn't see or speak to her for years.

Being a US citizen born in Mexico but found guilty of a violent crime, he had his citizenship stripped. Part of a new set of laws passed under the Clinton administration. He snuck back into the country after his sentence was up (reduced because he took the plea), was around for a year, terrorizing the family, got caught for "illegal reentry" did more jail time and was deported again. This time it stuck.

Meanwhile, I'm growing up in a VERY small town in Maine, the kind teen dramas about football teams are made of. I'm a known quantity because my family had been on the news because my dad killed someone and the local boys in blue put him to justice. This was awkward later on, in middle school, when it turned out the two officers who came to arrest him were the coaches of the football team. I eventually quit because I wanted to play golf. Part of me always hated that they took it a little easier on me than the other guys, though.

This all lead to wearing a lot of different masks growing up. Certainly had to wear the straight mask in a town where my classmates joked openly about lynching the ONE black guy in the school (in the early 2000s, mind you). Certainly had to pretend that my dad was innocent. Certainly had to pretend it didn't bother me that he was gone. Certainly had to pretend I wasn't scared about him coming back. Certainly felt like I had to pretend that everything was A-Okay, happy to be here, definitely didn't frequently wish I was dead, or that nothing scared me more than someday becoming my dad.

In college, I'd visit my parents in Mexico a couple of times, then not again for years. My mom would come to the states about half of every year, so I'd see her, but not him. A few years ago, I went to live with them for a year while I figured out what to do with my life after college. I'd just gotten back from being a visiting scholar at a university in Hiroshima, and had absolutely no idea what the fuck to do about anything.

My mom suggested I take a job at a call center, tutoring the locals in English. Why not?

It was the worst year of my life. I had no money. Getting the work visa took almost the entire year I was there. Mexico, corruption, greasing the wheels, but refusing to grease the wheels, and

trying to do things right through their merciless bureaucracy.

All the while, living with my dad, who made it very apparent, despite claiming otherwise, that he was very disappointed in me, that I was a lazy sack of shit, good for nothing, and so on. Just a full year of that, until I got a job freelance writing, made arrangements to move in with my best friend back home, and flew the fuck out.

It was truly the worst year of my life. The darkest period, with the darkest thoughts, full of nightmares, both when asleep and awake, dreaming that he'd be dead, fantasizing that I'd be the one to do it. I can't say enough how bad it was. I wish I could really illustrate how bad it was, but this email would be ten pages longer. Another time, maybe.

I escaped. Everything from my childhood made more sense. I reconnected with my sister. I realized the depth of my dad's insanity that he was a true sociopath. He's only charming and kind when it suits him, but if he doesn't get his way, watch out. Remorseless, wicked, frightening, cold, calculating, a bully, a monster.

It's every reason I connected so deeply with your run on *Venom*. And your run on *Uncanny X-Force*. I am your version of Flash Thompson. I've had my bouts with rage (thankfully never directed at anyone, or even with anyone else in the room). I've feared, in the very depths of my soul, becoming my dad. I know that half of my genetic code is that of a monster. I carry a lot of self-loathing. Less now. Much less now than my teens and early 20s.

I'm happy now. I have someone in my life who helps make me even happier than I was before I even met him. I work in this industry. I have a close circle of friends; I've gotten to meet most of my heroes. (You're one of only a couple I haven't met yet.) I love my work, I love my friends, and I love my boyfriend. I love that my dad is trapped in a country far from here, and I've spoken to him once in five years.

It took me a long time to get here. I certainly went through a lot of years trying desperately to survive in a world I never thought would accept me. Drugs, punk rock, self-destruction, self-loathing, falling in love with the wrong people, making terrible fucking decisions every day until it seemed like every decision was the wrong one.

Which brings me to DEADLY CLASS. I read all of your books, but DEADLY CLASS is the book I look most forward to every single month. If my disposable income shrunk to three bucks a month, I'd spend it on DEADLY CLASS. If it were less than that, I'd find a damn way to get it. If I could afford to buy every single one of Wes' originals, I would buy the book in its entirety in original page art. Until I can afford to, it's picking and choosing significant pages, which he way undercharges for, by the way.

I identify with the book on so many levels. The stupid unfounded machismo, the need to prove yourself to your peers, the rituals you discover when trying to make friends (the kind you can only discover when you've been forced into so many

unfamiliar situations at an early age), identifying with the misfits more than anyone else, being damaged, seeking those who share your level of damage and finding you can really only relate to them, getting way too fucked up and getting into really bad situations. I could go on and on and on. You know this is true because I already have gone on and on and on. I could go through every issue, page by page, citing every single thing that's happened to me to really "prove" how much I identify with Marcus and his crew, but I figure that's pretty damn evident by now.

Why did I write all of this? What do I hope to achieve? Do I think we're gonna be best buds from here on out? Did I want to inflate your ego a little bit?

Nah. We're a continent and a decade in age apart. Your ego's doing fine, I'm sure (I know you'll always carry those insecurities with you the same way I do, but let's face it, you're doing fine, right?).

I wrote all of this to really illustrate what it is about your writing that I connect with, what you do means to me, how you remind me with every issue that even if your early years were a pile of horseshit, you can always turn that around and be better than that. Upbringing doesn't control your destiny, even if it informs it. That you can even turn those shitty circumstances into a lucrative career.

You're giving a lot of people hope. You're giving them something to connect to, that they can aspire to. You're giving a generation of pissed off people a place to lose themselves in, the catharsis we all crave so much. You're entertaining, and sharing a part of yourself. You're writing with raw honesty, helping people work through their own issues.

Thank you, Rick. Thank you for writing comics that I love so much, and connect to so deeply. If we ever meet in person, we can skip this part of the conversation and talk about music or whatever.

Thank you for everything. I'm sure I'll see you on the con circuit this year at some point. And I'm sorry for dumping all of this crazy on you. But to be fair, you started it.

All the best,

Jarrett Melendez
Comic Art House

RR - Thanks for taking the time to share this. It means a lot to me to read that the nonsense I type has some kind of impact on actual human people. Back in the days when I was still trying to figure out what I wanted to do with my life, it was all of my favorite writers and musicians who inspired me to take a crack at expressing myself and tell my own stories. It sounds like you've got a pretty big story to tell yourself. Might be time to sit down and get to scripting.

Next issue is... A pretty big one for us. It's the culmination of everything we've been building to since issue one!

I hope we'll see you here in 30 days.

Rick

NEXT ISSUE

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DEADLY CLASS



1988
#13
\$3.50

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